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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4275
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9408
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6308
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4353
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3172
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9936
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3263
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0364
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2341
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0252
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6865
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4723
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1341
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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001527

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: AMBASSADOR URGES PRIME MINISTER TO
SEIZE OPPORTUNITY FOR PEACE WITHOUT PRE-CONDITIONS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Ambassador Blake and the DCM met Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremenayake September 15 to encourage his government to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Ambassador urged the Prime Minister to seize the current "significant opportunity for peace," and said the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) should enter negotiations without setting out pre-conditions. The Ambassador noted U.S. and international efforts to limit Tiger financing and weapons, including an FBI sting operation that resulted in 15 arrests and the US-initiated contact group meeting on limiting arms transfers and financing to the LTTE in Washington September 27. The Ambassador said that while these international efforts are important, it is essential for the GSL to develop and pursue a strong political strategy and negotiate a lasting peace settlement.

12. (C) Wickremenayake responded, "We have always kept our doors open. It is they (the LTTE) who left the negotiating table." He said that talks between the two sides must not permit the LTTE to regroup and strengthen its fighting capabilities, a problem the GSL has encountered before. The Prime Minister then discussed the government's efforts to bring the opposition United National Party (UNP) back into the All-Party Conference (APC), a group tasked with drafting a framework for greater political devolution. The Prime Minister expressed hope that the APC could produce a framework document that may eventually serve as a basis for negotiations with the LTTE. He said the UNP's participation was especially important because any final solution would require the endorsement of a two-thirds majority in parliament, so the two major parties should find common ground. (Note: The media reported that seven members of the governing Sri Lanka Freedom Party and seven members of the UNP are meeting at the parliamentary complex September 15 to discuss a number of issues, including the peace process. Septel to follow September 18. End note.) Wickremenayake said the process of building consensus with the UNP and bringing the party to the APC could take "several weeks."

¶3. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about key priorities aside from the peace process, the Prime Minister said economic development outside of Colombo and the Western Province was a major goal. He mentioned the toll tsunami damage took on tourism and fishing, and said while much of the recovery is completed, the need for greater infrastructure remains. He said the GSL would focus on developing rural areas, increasing dairy farming capacity, and strengthening the fishing industry. The Ambassador noted continuing US assistance following the tsunami and the work of the Millennium Challenge Corporation; the Prime Minister expressed his thanks.

¶4. (C) Comment: The Ambassador shared the same message with Wickremeyake that we have consistently expressed to the GSL: the government should take this opportunity for peace and enter negotiations without demanding pre-conditions. Wickremeyake responded with the familiar caveat that the Tigers could use the time for talks to strengthen their fighting capacity. He did not elaborate other conditions, but is known as a hardliner on the peace process. End comment.

BLAKE